



Vayetzei – Fleeing and Finding

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

And Jacob left Be'er Sheva and he went to Haran (Bereishis 28:10)

Yaakov fled the familial home to escape the wrath of his older brother, Esav. Although his mother said it would only be “*yamim achadim, a few days,*” Yaakov understood that the road ahead was long and tumultuous.

The commentaries question why the Torah had to tell us both that Yaakov left Be'er Sheva and that he went to Haran. If the Torah would have just stated that Yaakov went to Haran it would have been clear that he left Be'er Sheva as well.

Rashi explains that the Torah is teaching us that the departure of a great person from a particular place has an impact on the residents of that place. When a righteous person lives among people he influences them through instruction and role-modeling. When he leaves, his departure is felt in a tangible fashion. As such, “*Yaakov left Be'er Sheva*” teaches us that that Yaakov’s departure was felt by the residents of Be'er Sheva and “*he went to Haran,*” is telling us of Yaakov’s intended destination.

The Beis HaLevi (Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik, 1820-1892) takes a different approach. He explains that people take flight for different reasons. There are times in life when one’s objective is to get away from their current circumstances. I don’t have a particular destination; I just know that I don’t want to be “here.” And there are times when I am not looking to escape from my current circumstances; I need to leave because there is somewhere else I need to be. I am engaging in a journey to reach a pre-meditated destination.

Yaakov’s journey had both of these elements. He left home because of the command of his parents (specifically his mother). He left home because he feared for his life at the hands of Esav. He had to get out of Be'er Sheva. Yet, at the same time he had defined destination – Haran. This was the place he needed to travel to (not simply because it is where his mother instructed him to go) to actualize his destiny and build his family. As such both parts of the verse are necessary. “*And Yaakov left Be'er Sheva,*” he was running from danger; “*and he went to Haran,*” he was running to his destiny.

The Beis HaLevi sensitizes us to the two types of journeys we each take throughout life. The journey “from” and the journey “to.” There are times in life when my circumstances are unhealthy and difficult and I must extricate myself from them in order to become a whole person. We take flight from our current reality in order to escape negative circumstances. But there is a danger when you are running from something. You can end up without direction. You can spend a life time running and running and never reaching a destination. On the other hand, there are times in life when I realize that life can and should be more. There are moments when I feel that I can and should be more. And I make a decision to grow and improve. I leave my current situation in effort to expand my heart and soul – but if I don’t know where I am going, if there is no life itinerary, I can end up spinning my wheels and experience mounting life frustration. It is not just enough to journey “from,” we must also journey “to.” I must create a plan that includes my intended destination. Where do I want to go? Who do I want to be? And then I can answer the question, how can I get there?

There are times in life when we must leave our Be'er Sheva, either because we have become complacent or because it poses certain spiritual or emotional dangers. But as we leave Be'er Sheva we must identify our Haran. We must identify our intended destination, our intended goals and our future aspirations, hopes and dreams.